# State of the Art Transparency: Lessons from Europe and North America

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This Special Issue of the Journal of Risk Research was initiated to increase the evidence base supporting critical understanding of the use and impacts of transparency as a policy tool in risk management and regulation in Europe and North America. The lead research articles and perspectives were initially presented at a two-day workshop supported by the Journal of Risk Research and its publisher Taylor and Francis, which took place in Lavandou, Provence, 19th - 20th June 2014. In this editorial we introduce the motivations for the special issue and offer a brief summary of the contribution of each article highlighting key intersections and points of concurrence.

In recent years, many policymakers have received strong demands to enhance transparency, which has been accompanied by growing academic interest in the changing nature of risk communication and regulation in the EU, US and elsewhere (Lofstedt et. al. 2011). In particular, several scholars have begun to challenge assumptions that transparency is a positive good that can, for instance, promote accountability, enhance legitimacy and (re)build public trust. They have illuminated the need to examine the concept more carefully particularly highlighting that initiatives are not problem free while recognizing different types or varieties of transparency (e.g. fishbowl versus reasoned transparency or general versus particularised) (Heald, 2006; Hood, 2007; Lofstedt and Bouder, 2013).

However, to date there has been relatively little work that has provided empirical evidence to inform the transparency debate and move beyond first principles (Etzioni, 2010; Lofstedt, 2013). This has led to a dearth of research that can inform decision-making in many policy domains. Addressing this gap, the articles in this special issue provide evidence on a range of issue areas, with several contributions offering a transatlantic comparative perspective, from which to move the transparency debate forwards. These contributions collectively extend academic and policy insights into the difficulties surrounding the policy uses, mechanisms and impacts of transparency, and set a path towards future avenues of inquiry and policy practice. Here we provide a brief summary of these contributions.

The article by Lofstedt and Way sets out the context of the growing trend towards more open, inclusive and transparent models of regulatory decision making in recent years. The article also reports findings from a survey conducted to inquire into how members of the public are likely to react to so called 'fish-bowl' transparency policies associated with pharmaceuticals. The findings show that respondents become more worried and concerned, and in light of such information expressed they would seek

more advice and consider changing their behaviour, which may be ill-advised in certain cases.

Commentaries by Meijer, the Irish Medicines Board, Miller, Mossman, and Breckenridge further reflect upon and elucidate the issues raised by Lofstedt and Way's article from a variety of academic, legal, regulatory and political perspectives. These commentaries address the presumption of an informed, confident public and that public trust necessarily arises from enacting transparency policies. They also raise practical considerations of how transparency supports the role and contributions of end users, such as patients, and how such information is weighed in the context of benefits and risks of taking drugs for them personally. The response to comments by Lofstedt and Way both welcomes these critical and constructive insights and provides a postscript to the original study concerning the growing pace of pharmaceutical transparency and its impacts on public/patient trust of regulators and companies in the sector.

Taking a comparative perspective O'Connor next outlines the pressing need for different types of empirical studies to benefit regulatory process in the US and EU. O'Connor calls particular attention to addressing open questions concerning whether transparency improves the quality of regulations, how transparency is used in practice and its impacts at different levels, and who benefits from available transparency mechanisms. Answering this call, the articles which follow help to shed some further light on these issues.

Adopting a comparative line of inquiry, Dudley and Wegrich examine the issue of regulatory reform and the relation of transparency procedures in the US and the EU to impact analysis and public comment. Their study makes an important contribution to current understandings by addressing the role of transparency in improving the quality of regulations, summarising different approaches within the US and EU, and assessing their relative merits.

The article by Dixon, McCommas, Besley and Steinhardt presents an experimental study on the impact of transparency practices on consumer views about the labelling of GM foods in the US. This follows debate about the disclosure not only of product ingredients, but also access to the process that makes decisions about labelling. The study findings underscore the importance of procedural justice perceptions and their impact on support for controversial risk-related decisions.

Also addressing the impacts of transparency policies from the perspectives of end users two final studies are directed towards the case of the European Medicines Agency transparency. In this case the release of information has aimed to enable the re-use of data and empower patients directly and indirectly to make more informed decisions. In the first study Lofstedt, Way, Bouder and Evensen find that general practitioners (GPs) and medical specialists have little awareness and knowledge of how the safety of medicines is assessed, or the procedures by which it is regulated and disclosed. The study respondents also felt that it was a bad idea to release information into the public domain before safety issues have been investigated by regulators. In the second study Way, Bouder, Lofstedt and Evensen examine the views of patients directly. Their findings show that essential information about the net effects of transparency policies will be missed if the perspectives of patients are not accounted for.

In conclusion, it transpires that transparency policies alone are insufficient to address the real world complexities of communicating with patients and other end users. Much more needs to be done in this area not only to match transparency initiatives

with science-based benefit/risk communication, but also to meet the demands of communicating effectively in different political and sociocultural contexts (Kasperson 2014; Wardman 2014).

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